Speech by Ruben Berrios - Puerto Rico March 19, 1981

Brother Chairman, Brothers,

When inviting me as a fighter for the Independence of my party and my country to speak about decolonization and Independence, you have given me an opportunity to tempt to speak of the noble spirits with clear thoughts of the last one hundred and fifty years of the Portorican history, and what has been the reason behind the eruption of dozens of nations into the political scenery of the universe.
I furthermore thank you, my brothers from Aruba, for having given me a personal opportunity of sharing with you some of my reflection of the reasons which have become the standards of action of all my political life.

Perhaps my words to-day will not be typical of a conference such as this. I will try to abstract from the situations that exist to the general situation of the rights of the people.

I am sure that each socialist has felt in the deepest part of his heart a doubt, a question of the compatibility or incompatibility between the struggle of nationalism and the struggle of internationalism.

I don't think there is a difference, I believe that only that name given by nocuous influences has made us believe there is such an incompatibility.

Even if that may seem strange I should start by saying that in spite of being 20 years involved in political struggles of my country, it is the very first time that I have analyzed in a form such as this, the reasons that have led me to the political action for the independence of my country.

When trying to understand this apparent paradox, where actions seem to take place before the thoughts and practice before theory, we will then understand the reason for the struggle for independence.

The struggle for the freedom of the country, of any country, like all great loves, invariably will start at the point where we would call the most noble of human instincts.

I am not concern about recognizing that the passionate practice, intuitive practice, poetic practice if you wish, for the homeland preceeds the rational and orderly struggle.

Of the love and dedication to the independence of my homeland I could say what Pablo Neruda said, mentioned by our brother from Chile of another great love of his : I don't ask bread

to teach me, all I am asking that I always have bread for all the days of my life. I don't ask explanations from the night, I wait for them and it involves me. I don't wish to say with this that the nation and the homeland and the struggle for independence does not have firm basis in recent and historic process. Since it is so closely tied in to human nature and well settled in historic process, that is why the struggle for national rights form part of what I have called the noble instinct that comes from the heart without need of explanation.

In the concept of nations homeland independence are not as some have wished us to believe concepts that arise together with the development of nation state, children of the last 4 or 5 centuries of humanity.

The contents of these concepts covered with another disguise, with other names, is as ancient perhaps as humanity. In other words , the modern concepts of decolonization of independence are politically and legal terms, which will only reflect in modern times, under new circumstances, the eternal struggle of the peoples for eliminating any foreign yoke when Massini who has the modern concept of nation state stated. Our country is not just a piece of territory. This territory is only the basis, the country is the idea that arises from the basis. The feeling of love, the feeling of brotherhood that unites the children of that territory was expressing an ideal that existed many centuries before the written word of it.

Logic or dialectic of human prophecies called for the wish based on the spirit and the inheritance demands that the sweetest sentiments of the nature be reserved in the human species at least for the relationship between the mother and the child.

It is true that since it is a matter of rational beings on the scale of human feelings going from the maternal and children/mother relation, friendly feelings, national and tribe feelings and those of the whole humanity shall only difference in degree and not in the essence.

But it is true also that the capacity of the human being to give up himself instinctively has certain limits in time and in space.

Love, the closest in is to home the more spontaneous it is. Instinctively and wholeheartedly, the further it goes from home the more it is diluted, the less tangible it is. Facts to the historical and social process which includes the procedures of a group of human beings located out of territory depending one upon the other but understanding each other in the same language, having the same memories and customs.

...re arises at one time far back in the history of mankind the human conglomerate that we call people. The more harmonious they are, the more compact they are, the older the relationships within one people perse, the greater feeling of itself would that people have and the greater feeling of difference would exist with other peoples.

And the links of solidarity and respect of this people towards themselves will be greater as well.

Facing the facts of life and the calamities as well as the sharing of glory will turn them into a homeland which in itself will have a value, a value additional to the sub of all the inhabitants therein.
Thus in the history little by little the feeling of homelands is born.

The recognition that the country itself has a value perse is not just sheer chance. The word homeland is to be found in the latin language "pater" which means "father" and the word "nation" is in the latin verb "natale", which means 'to be born".

The homeland calls for affection that are similar to what a father and a mother calls for and the nation generates historical and inheritant feelings that are as deep as having obtained their lives therefrom.

It is completely natural and agrees with the historical process that human beings once they start to develop the behavioral patterns to govern their relationships in societies that are more and more complex, start to develop matters that rise from their same living and their condition because it is natural that it is the people perse which will understand its needs and its aspirations better.

Any attempt to impose upon the people from another area the rules of conduct or laws, would be repudiated consciously or unconsciously by the subordinate people.

The only justification for such an imposition would have to start with the promise of the superiority of people over other peoples or of some peoples over other peoples.

Hence it is not odd that using what we could call an open face sincerity the European countries and the United States of North America have had no shame from the sixteen century on in Europe and from the 18th-19th century on in the United States to impose their imperialism under the words of white man's burden to speak of an Anglicism.

At this moment we have to introduce the concept of nation state, which is a political and juridical concept. It is

substantially different to that of homeland and nation.

As we have seen one is historical with affection and ties at the culture aspect. The difference between both concepts can be seen clearly in Europe itself from each at this time, modern times, the nations state arise and the concept of nations state.

In Europe several homelands, several nations became nation states. Examples to mention a few Great-Britain, Spain, Soviet Union.

What happened was in the practice that in almost all the countries is that the strongest nation in military and economic terms has imposed at one time or another the domination over the weaker.

But the strongest ones in Europe were not just happy to dominate other nations of Europe. The colonial and imperial prophesies devided up the European, Asian and African countries, that America devided up again.

But again new homelands and new nations were set up in America. It would not be long for the struggle of the oppressed people to start to see their own liberation.

The existence of more than a 150 nations states, all independent, is a witness of the nature of what I would call the nation of the reason and the passion for independence.

To-day, unfortunately, there are a few classical colonies left in the world. Puerto Rico, my homeland is one of them.. unfortunately and Aruba, our host country.

We still have several problems to solve of the great European countries and other nationalities that live in these countries.

There is no doubt whatsoever that due to the historic process and due to the patriotic passion that arises therefrom, it is quite clear that all the countries of the world have the right of becoming nations states.

This has been recognized by all humanity in resolutions 15 14 15 of the United Nations, which is known as the Declaration of Independence, which recognizes an I quote from the Declaration approved unanimously with the disgusting abstention of seven or eight countries that it recognizes the inalienable right to indqendence of the countries and the people under colonialism.

I should add that to try to establish deny the existence of independence and the evil of humanity, is to read history backwards.

That explanation would just be a simplistic one and not true

as the other ones who states that the sources of all evil is the attempt of some countries to supress the nationalities upon others.

The problems of exploitation, of war, of economic and social and political injustice arise from very complex historical prophesies, which at the same time arise as the nationalities are arising as independent nations.

Without at this time trying to analyze the large problems of humanity , the least we could point to, we who defend nationality, is that there is a very clear cut difference between defensive nationalism of those of us who struggle to rule in our own home and the expansionism which wishes to cover itself and hide under the values of the nation.

The difference that goes from the fight of Bolivia and the angel Jose Martin to Hittler, is in such a way that to speak the three as nationalists, we would commit an unforgiveable sin of using the same word to describe realities that are completely different.

My dear brothers, it would be infantile to say that independence is a magical talent thru which the people of the world would solve their problems, but we still must recognize that independence is a necessary condition to-day even though it is not sufficient to struggle with the problems that affect the different nations and peoples.

This is so, because independence allows the people to work more flexibly from the point of view of their own interest and not with the prospect of the interest of the dominating country and much more so it allows the countries with similar problems to face those who think of refusing them their rights with coordinated actions.

I must at this time of course mention the tremendous modern problems of neo-colonialism, which in practice makes political independence a disguise.

To analyze this it would be necessary ofcourse to give another speech, but it is enough to say at this time that to the degree to which political independence and free economic cooperation interdependence establish the guidelines to govern the relationship between nations state; to that degree we will see good results for all of humanity. But to the degree to which neo-colonialism prevails there will be some nations and particularly the countries that exploit them, living on the work and the exploitation of other peoples.

Of course under the cover of political independence which is a lie.

My dear colleagues, it is possible that some of you may be asking yourselves at this time, why I have not made direct mention of the values of internationalism which socialists and social-democrats believe in.

And I would say those values can only have a full meaning when there is independence for all the peoples of the world.

If not, it will be the internationalism of Alexander Napoleon or Catherine the Great.

The respect of humanity can only be borne on the basis of respect for oneself and for ones people.

If we don't love our brothers and fellow-men, how can we really suffer for those who are really very far away. And while the conditions of injustice continue to exist, with the lack of equality that exists to-day among the rich and poor countries, the universalist theories used by the powerful will be nothing more, in the best of cases, just meta-physical abstractions and in the worst of cases just a justification which will cause political sub-ordination and economic exploitation.

Hence defensive nationalism is not only a demand that arises from the need of the sub-ordinate countries. The defense thereof is an obligation of all socialists and social democrats of the world who must look upon nationalism there-on as a tremendous lever for promoting justice and equality in the whole world.

Only from the perspective of the future of a world of justice and equality based on the political independence and economic cooperation, can the human beings perhaps conceive themselves as childrens of humanity, as children of their own mothers and their own homelands.

All of this of course does not mean that socialists and social democrats don't have as of right now and forever the obligation of feeling that it is an offense against us any offensive to any human being in any place of the world.

And of course it does not mean either that we are not obliged to commit ourselves to the struggle for social equality and political freedom, no matter where it exists. I dream of a day when all the human beings will break all the artificial, political barriers that separate us, but the dream could become a horible nightmare if the nations in the homelands that give life and color to humanity were to become a uniform mass with no difference and no color and no work.

It is not in the nature of things that the Anglo-Saxon des-cribe the sun with the same colors as the poet of the tropics

does and on the other hand if it is so as we were taught by Bolivar, we should not wish for this.

And if these were the opposition of nature, we would have to overcome nature. And greater would be the nightmare if we, Socialists and Social-Democrats were to confuse the dream of future internationalism with the hard realities of the present. And to work without wishing to together with the new colonial and imperialism in the defense of a false internationalism under whose cover subordination, injustice and loot is being hidden.

All this then means that the struggle for the independence of the nations is an essential part of the struggle for the rights of human beings and to refuse to support the struggle for independence is to speak of internationalism and to practice imperialism.

I may say with pride that the Socialists Internationals, according to those principles, have been acting at all times. And the test was presented as all men who believe in liberty have a chance occurred in Puerto Rico and the Socialists International proved its worth and adopted the resolution in Santo Domingo, where it recognizes the inalienable right and asked for the support of the struggle for the independence of Puerto Rico and repudiates any attempt at perpetuating colonialism under any manifestation as well as any attempt for assimilating Puerto Rico as a state of the American union.

The Socialist International knew how to understand the thought, so did Copal to understood the inheritance of Bolivar and in Aruba MEP is understanding this as well.

That is why, in conclusion, my dear brothers, I would like to say that no one can be a Socialist or a Social-Democrat, a real one that is, if they are not an unconditional ally of the struggle of the peoples for their liberation and independence.

No believer in the values of nationalities is nothing but just a chauvinist if the national conception is not that of a just homeland and that of a free peoples ready to add their solidarity in the struggle for the rights of all human beings no matter where they may be found.

The independence of Latin-America will depend and will be decided as was predicted by Bolivar in the Antilles, which we hope will soon be able to celebrate here, to say to the whole world from here and Puerto Rico: Biba Free Aruba, Biba Puerto Rico Libre.

* - *

Aruba, March 19, 1981.